THE NEW SUNDAY EXPRESS

BENGALURU • SUNDAY • DECEMBER 21, 2025 • ₹12.00 • PAGES 28 • LATE CITY EDITION

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SLAIN BANGLADESH YOUTH LEADER LAID TO REST AMID TIGHT SECURITY

The funeral of Bangladesh youth leader Sharif Osman Hadi (pic) was held in Dhaka on Saturday, drawing large crowds amid extra-tight security

MOHD YUNUS, ARMY CHIEF ATTEND FUNERAL

Bangladesh's interim government head Muhammad Yunus and army chief General Waker-uz-Zaman attended the funeral of the leader of the radical right-wing cultural group 'Inqilab Mancha'. A candidate in the February 12 general elections, Hadi was shot in the head by masked gunmen on December 12 and died while being treated in Singapore | P12

24-HOUR ULTIMATUM TO GOVT TO ARREST KILLERS

- Tens of thousands attended the funeral procession. Hadi was buried at Dhaka University's central mosque. Later, Inqilab Mancha issued a 24-hour ultimatum to the Yunus-led government to arrest his killers
- He was waging a campaign demanding Hasina's return to Bangladesh to face death penalty after a special tribunal sentenced her to death

32-year-old

HADI WAS AN OUTSPOKEN CRITIC OF INDIA

CHENNAI ▪ MADURAI ▪ VIJAYAWADA ▪ BENGALURU ▪ KOCHI ▪ HYDERABAD ▪ VISAKHAPATNAM ▪ COIMBATORE ▪ KOZHIKODE ▪ THIRUVANANTHAPURAM ▪ BELAGAVI ▪ BHUBANESWAR ▪ SHIVAMOGGA ▪ MANGALURU ▪ TIRUPATI ▪ TIRUCHY ▪ TIRUNELVELI ▪ SAMBALPUR ▪ HUBBALLI ▪ DHARMAPURI ▪ KOTTAYAM ▪ KANNUR ▪ VILLUPURAM ▪ KOLLAM ▪ TADEPALLIGUDEM ▪ NAGAPATTINAM ▪ THRISSUR ▪ KALABURAGI

T20 WORLD CUP TEAM

NEW BALANCE AS GILL DROPPED, KISHAN IN

FIROZ MIRZA/GOMESH S @Chennai

IT was a story of two players. Ishan Kishan until Thursday was playing Syed Mushtaq Ali Trophy scoring runs for Jharkhand including a hundred in the final. Closer to the India team, Shubman Gill, who has had a forgettable T20I season, was the vice captain. Little did the two know that their fortunes would take different course on Saturday when the India team for the all-important T20 World Cup in India and Sri Lanka was announced.

Kishan, who was out of favour for two years found his way back into the team. Of course, it was all because of his tremendous form in recent months. On the other hand, contrary to belief, newly-appointed captain of the Test and One-day teams, did not find a place in the 15 despite he being with the India set-up during the South Africa T20I series until Friday.

If Kishan was a natural selection, there were murmurs about Gill's exclusion. There were multiple indications that suggested Gill was not informed of the decision until Saturday. With pressure piling on Gill and captain Suryakumar Yadav for their lack of runs, team management seem to have decided to take the harsh decision for the World Cup. Chief selector Ajit Agarkar said that the call was taken to accommodate keeper-batter at the top-order. "At the end of the day, you are looking to see what are the best combinations or different options that you can get as a squad to give you the best chance of doing well in the World Cup. Whether it is decided today, yesterday, one week earlier, it doesn't really matter. Hopefully, we get it right come the World Cup," Agarkar said in Mumbai.

He's a terrific player. It's just that the situation is such that we need a keeper to back up the order

— Captain Suryakumar Yadav on Gill

For Kishan, even he could be back up for Sanju, call-up comes as a timely boost. After being dropped rather unceremoniously in late 2023 when he asked for a break due to mental fatigue, Kishan lost the central contract before going back to domestic cricket. He learnt to remain patient and calm.

"Before every match in the SMAT, we used to have a video chat. It was more about mental things. Before the tournament started, I told him that this is his chance to impress the selectors. He not only did that but forced them to include him in the team," Kishan's coach Uttam Mazumdar said. P15

'Maha jungle raj' in Bengal, says Modi

Slams Congress in Guwahati for 'defending infiltrators'

People listen to PM Narendra Modi speaking virtually in Nadia district | PTI

SUBHENDU MAITI, PRASANTA MAZUMDAR @ Kolkata/ Guwahati

PRIME Minister Narendra Modi on Saturday launched a scathing attack on the Mamata Banerjee government in West Bengal, likening it to Bihar's past lawlessness and calling it a "maha jungle raj".

Virtually addressing a gathering at Taherpur in Nadia district, one of the Matua-dominated belts in the state, over phone from the Kolkata airport as his helicopter could not land there due to dense fog, Modi hit out at the alleged corruption, nepotism and politics of appeasement by the ruling Trinamool Congress in the state.

"Because of the state government's cut-money and commission culture, people of Bengal are being deprived of development schemes worth thousands of crores," he alleged. Positive development in the state can happen if the BJP gets to form a double-engine government. "Give us chance to do so," he urged the gathering.

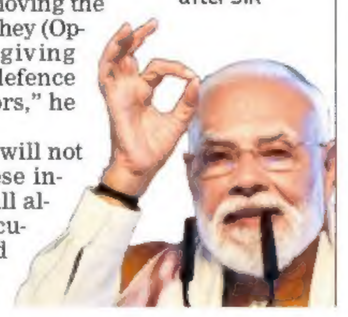
Citing the recent elections in Bihar, he said the massive win of the BJP-led NDA in the state will open the road for victory of the BJP in Bengal in the coming assembly polls, adding, "Maha jungle raj will come to an end with formation of BJP government in the state."

Modi was scheduled to inaugurate the 66.7-km four-laning of the Barajaguli–Krishnanagar section of NH-34 in Nadia district and lay the foundation stone for a 17.6-km four-laning of the Barasat–Barajaguli section in North 24 Parganas.

In Guwahati, Modi launched a scathing attack on the Congress for speaking up in defence of the "infiltrators" (illegal migrants) by criticising the Election Commission's Special Intensive Revision (SIR) of poll rolls. Addressing a gathering after inaugurating the new terminal building of Lokpriya Gopinath Bardoloi International Airport in Guwahati, he said the government was working to stop infiltration and identify the infiltrators but the Congress and INDIA bloc openly adopt "anti-national agendas".

"The Supreme Court also spoke about removing the infiltrators but they (Opposition) are giving statements in defence of the infiltrators," he alleged.

"Such people will not protect Assamese interests. They will allow others to occupy your land and forests," Modi warned.



Infiltrators are blessed by the TMC. The ruling party is opposing SIR to save the infiltrators. You (TMC) give go back slogans against the infiltrators not against me

Narendra Modi

Will serve Matuas, says PM

"I assure every Matua and Namasudra family that we will always serve them. They are not here at the mercy of TMC," Modi said. A section of the Matuas are upset as their names do not figure in West Bengal's draft electoral rolls after SIR

STRUGGLE TO CONTINUE

Sonia Gandhi vowed to fight against the 'black law' | PTI

Govt bulldozed MGNREGA, says Sonia Gandhi

PREETHA NAIR @ New Delhi

ACCUSING the Modi Government of bulldozing the MGNREGA, Congress Parliamentary Party chairperson Sonia Gandhi on Saturday asserted that the party will fight against the "black law" that seeks to repeal the job scheme.

Both Houses of Parliament passed the VB–G Ram G Bill on Thursday that seeks to replace the two-decades-old MGNREGA. The Opposition has urged the government to send the new bill to a standing committee saying that it's a "conditional, centrally controlled scheme stacked against states and workers".

In a video message, Sonia Gandhi said the Centre has altered the structure of MGNREGA without any consultation, discussion or taking the Opposition into confidence, and even removed Mahatma Gandhi's name, undermining the spirit and intent of the landmark legislation.

"Twenty years ago, I fought to secure the right to employment for the poor. Today too, I am fully committed to this struggle," she said.

She alleged that decisions on who will get employment, where and how, will now be taken centrally from Delhi, ignoring ground realities and weakening the role of the gram panchayats. By weakening MGNREGA, the Modi government had attacked the interests of millions of farmers, labourers, and landless people, she said.

"It is a matter of great regret that just recently, the government ran a bulldozer over MGNREGA," the Congress leader said. Asserting that MGNREGA was never a party-centric initiative but a programme rooted in national and public interest, she said diluting the law amounts to an assault on crores of farmers, workers and landless rural poor.

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Shivakumar: CM and I have message from Cong high command

EXPRESS NEWS SERVICE @Bengaluru

KARNATAKA Deputy Chief Minister DK Shivakumar claimed here on Saturday that the Congress high command has given some message to both Chief Minister Siddaramaiah and him on power sharing, and declared that both will go to New Delhi together when summoned for talks to resolve the change in leadership issue.

"Will let you (media) know and will not do it without your notice. I will never go secretly. They have called both of us over the phone and told us something. They will tell us when to visit them. We will certainly go, can we decide not to go," he questioned when reporters asked whether he was going to meet high command leaders in Delhi.

On Naga Sadhus blessing him, he said, "They came home and blessed me. We can't say no to people who come home. In politics, it is natural for sages, saints, seers and seniors to bless us."

Shivakumar said he will travel to Delhi on Tuesday to meet Delhi Police's Economic Offences Wing in answer to the notice served to him in the National Herald case.

"The Directorate of Enforcement chargesheet has been quashed by a court in the National Herald case. Only one FIR is pending. We are protesting to tell the world how we are being harassed," he added.

Shivakumar said that when in Delhi, he will also attend a meeting on the river-linking project convened by the Union jal shakti ministry. "I will also discuss key irrigation projects of our state, like Mahadayi, Upper Krishna, Mekedatu and Upper Bhadra. I have sought time to meet the Union environment minister and Union urban development minister as well. I am meeting all of them to protect the state's interest. I have plans of meeting state MPs and then calling on the PM along with them if time permits," Shivakumar, who is also state Congress president, hoped. MORE ON P4

Speeding Rajdhani mows down herd of seven elephants in Assam district

PRASANTA MAZUMDAR @ Guwahati

THE Sairang-New Delhi Rajdhani Express rammed into a herd of wild elephants in Assam in the early hours of Saturday, killing seven and injuring a calf in Assam's Hojai district early Saturday.

Five coaches of the train got derailed, but there were no human casualties.

The accident occurred near a paddy field in the Jamunamukh-Kampur section under Lumding Division of Northeast Frontier Railway (NFR), about 126 km east of Guwahati.

The train connects Mizoram's Sairang (near Aizawl) to the Anand Vihar Terminal in Delhi. NFR said passengers from affected coaches were shifted to vacant berths in other coaches. After detaching the affected coaches, the train proceeded to Guwahati.

A dead jumbo at the accident site in Hojai district of Assam | PTI

"The incident was outside an elephant corridor. The loco pilot applied emergency brakes, but the elephants collided with the train," NFR said.

Helpline numbers (0361-2731621/2731622/2731623) were activated as senior officials rushed to the site. Restoration work was underway, with several trains cancelled or short-terminated.

Locals said one dead elephant was pregnant. Dulu Borah of Hati Bondhu, an NGO, said an early warning system could have averted the tragedy.

INHUMAN

Outrage after disabled teen assaulted at Bagalkot school

EXPRESS NEWS SERVICE @ Bagalkot

IN a disturbing and inhuman incident, a 16-year-old mentally challenged boy was brutally assaulted at the Divya Jyoti Special Children's Residential School in Sector No. 54 at Navanagar of Bagalkot. The victim, Deepak Rathod, was allegedly beaten with a belt and plastic pipe by the teacher, Akshay Indulkar, while his wife Malini too allegedly joined him in the assault. The residential school is run by the couple.

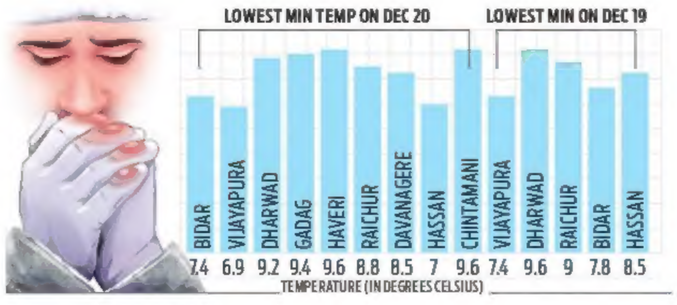
The attack on the boy continued even after he fell on the ground and was rolling and writhing in pain. The couple also threw chilli powder into the boy's eyes, stated a police complaint filed by the boy's parents. Though the incident occurred almost three months ago, it came to light only now after a video of the assault went viral, and his parents too saw it. The victim is said to be from Mantur village in Mudhol taluk.

When enraged parents gathered in front of the residential school and demanded strict action, the police rushed to the spot and initiated an inquiry.

Boy's mother Parvati Rathod said they admitted Deepak three years ago and paid a monthly fee of Rs 6,000. P7

Cold wave grips state, orange alert for N K'taka

EXPRESS NEWS SERVICE @ Bengaluru


LOWEST MIN TEMP ON DEC 20
LOWEST MIN ON DEC 19
BIDAR VIJAYAPURA DHARWAD GADAG HAVERI RAICHUR DAVANAGERE HASSAN CHINTAMANI VIJAYAPURA DHARWAD RAICHUR BIDAR HASSAN
7.4 6.9 9.2 9.4 9.6 8.8 8.5 7 9.6 7.4 9.6 9 7.8 8.5
TEMPERATURE (IN DEGREES CELSIUS)

THE India Meteorological Department (IMD) on Saturday issued an orange alert for most parts of north-interior Karnataka for the next two days, warning of severe cold wave conditions. The alert covers Bidar, Kalaburagi, Vijayanagar, Yadgir, Belagavi, Bagalkot and Raichur districts.

On Saturday, nine districts recorded a minimum temperature below 10 degrees Celsius. The IMD also issued a cold wave alert for most parts of south-interior Karnataka for the next two days. According to IMD data, Vijayapura recorded the lowest-minimum temperature of 6.9 degrees Celsius, followed by Hassan (7 degrees Celsius). Bidar came next with 7.4 degrees Celsius and Raichur 8.8 degrees Celsius. On December 19, five districts recorded a minimum temperature below 10 degrees Celsius. The lowest of 7.4 degrees Celsius was recorded in Vijayapura on December 19, followed by Bidar (7.8 degrees Celsius). On December 18, Raichur recorded the lowest minimum of 9.4 degrees Celsius.

IMD-Bengaluru Director-in-charge Dr N Puviarasan said that minimum temperatures will further dip in the coming days and citizens should be cautious. He attributed this to the northeasterly winds over interior Karnataka and easterly winds over coastal Karnataka in the lower tropospheric levels.

Severe cold wave conditions prevailed over Raichur, Bidar Vijayapura, and Davangere districts. Cold wave conditions also prevailed over Haveri, Dharwad, and Gadag districts.

According to IMD, severe cold wave conditions will also continue to prevail on December 21 and 22 over Bidar, Kalaburgi, Vijayapura, Yadgir, Raichur, Bagalkot, and Belagavi. P5

EXPRESS READ

Shuchi Kit: K'taka govt acts after TNIE report

Bengaluru: Following a TNIE report on girl students being deprived of Shuchi Kit, in which sanitary napkins are provided by the State Govt, the health department on Saturday gave administrative approval for the purchase and distribution of sanitary napkins for three months at the district level | P6

CBI arrests Lt Col on bribery charges

New Delhi: CBI arrested Lt Col Deepak Kumar Sharma in a bribery case. A case was filed against Lt Col Sharma, Deputy Planning Officer of International Cooperation and Exports, his wife Col Kajal Bali, and others, including a Dubai firm on charges of criminal conspiracy and bribery. Searches were conducted in Bengaluru | P7